

*The Portland Tribune reported on Thursday, May 14, 2009 that Portland's Street Car expansion will bring more manufacturing jobs to the Portland area. The streetcar expansion had been championed by Congressman Earl Blumenauer for years before Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood announced on April 30 that the federal government would help fund the project.*

Streetcars soon to be made in Oregon  
Clackamas company set to make six cars for Portland's system

By Merry MacKinnon  
The Portland Tribune, May 14, 2009

Workers with United Streetcar LLC of Clackamas, a subsidiary of Oregon Iron Works, put the finishing touches on a streetcar that will be delivered to the city of Portland May 15. The streetcar will then be tested on the city's tracks for up to 60 days.

A new streetcar in Portland does not normally attract attention. What makes the one to be delivered to the city May 15 special is that it wasn't manufactured in Eastern Europe, but in a factory in Clackamas, Oregon.

After delivery, the red and blue streetcar will be tested, without riders, on Portland's existing streetcar tracks for 45 to 60 days. If all goes as planned, red, white and blue Made-In-USA decals will be added to the streetcar's sides for its official unveiling and the start of its regular operations in Portland – likely sometime in July.

Four years in the planning, the streetcar has been produced inside a facility on the Oregon Iron Works' sprawling industrial site on Southeast Lawnfield Road in Clackamas. The prototype is the first modern streetcar manufactured in America since streetcar systems ceased operating in U.S. cities decades ago.

"Our plan is to become the leading U.S. maker of modern streetcars," said Chandra Brown, president of United Streetcar LLC, a subsidiary of Oregon Iron Works.

Founded in 1944, Clackamas' Oregon Iron Works has about 400 employees and fabricates a range of metal products, including bridges, barges, propellers for the U.S. Coast Guard and nuclear casks at Hanford.

Several years ago, it dawned on Brown, who also is Oregon Iron Works' vice president, that streetcars were an emerging market with a potentially bright economic future for some lucky manufacturer. Brown's interest in streetcars had been piqued at an Oregon Science and Technology Board meeting in Clackamas County, when discussion touched on streetcars as attractive alternative transit systems offering zero emissions, increased density, reduced car trips and urban renewal.

"It all started with that conversation," Brown said.

When Brown researched streetcars, she found that while some U.S. companies were constructing vintage trolleys, none manufactured modern streetcars, the kind that travel on Portland's downtown streets.

Brown wanted United Streetcar to build streetcars, not just design them. And since the city of Portland's fleet of imported streetcars was reliable and easy to maintain, United Streetcar partnered with Skoda, a Czech company that designed and constructed some of Portland's streetcars. In 2006, United Streetcar obtained an exclusive license to manufacture Skoda-designed modern streetcars in the United States.

Features of a modern streetcar include a low floor for easy boarding and an appearance similar to light-rail cars but with narrower bodies for maneuvering and lighter weight to reduce the load on tracks.

"Portland is the modern streetcar capital of the U.S.," Brown said. "People don't realize how many city officials and planners come to look at Portland's streetcar system."

Since signing the contract with Skoda, United Streetcar has spent millions gearing up.

"It costs a heck of a lot more to build a prototype," Brown said. "There are one-time costs. We hope to recoup that as we build more streetcars."

To help start the process, the federal government allotted \$4 million, with a "Buy American" provision – with \$3.2 million of that going to United Streetcar to build the prototype. The "Buy American" provision means that, the underlying streetcar's structure, wiring and installation are done by workers at the United Streetcar factory, and most other parts of the new streetcars are also produced by U.S. businesses.

"So it's not about any one company," Brown said. "It's creating opportunities for hundreds of small U.S. vendors."

More streetcars are coming down the assembly line, as Portland moves ahead with its streetcar loop to connect westside streetcars over the Broadway Bridge to Portland's inner east side – and as the city buys new streetcars for the eastside extension.

"We're getting that streetcar loop contract," Brown said. "We're the only qualified bidder."

According to Portland's Streetcar Project Manager Vicki Diede, the contract calls for six new streetcars.

"We are in the midst of negotiating the final contract" with United Streetcar, Diede said.

Meanwhile, United Streetcar is also one of two finalists bidding to build modern streetcars for the city of Tucson, Ariz.

## **Streetcars soon to be made in Oregon**

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“Once we’re ready to start building Portland’s streetcars, we’ll be hiring,” Brown said. “We’ve brought manufacturing jobs back to the U.S.”